

Summer Outings

Churchill's Chartwell

Reported by Lesley Gordon

COACH OUTINGS BY SOCIETY MEMBERS usually start quietly because of the early hour. This one, setting off later than usual at 11am on May 19th, saw the twenty-eight participants slightly crestfallen because of low cloud and the threat of rain, which boded ill for a visit to north-west Kent to see the home and gardens of the greatest Briton of them all. We need not have worried. The M26 gave way to the leafy lanes of the Weald, to brightly coloured rhododendrons, lush forested hillsides and pretty villages, and then we arrived at what

must be one of the most perfectly sited houses in the South of England. This was why he bought it, of course, in 1922, at the age of forty-eight, when a legacy from an Irish cousin provided the funds he had previously lacked. It was to remain his pride and joy until his death over forty years later.

The National Trust has kept the grounds immaculate and provided sympathetic visitor facilities. After a short stroll along a winding pathway bordered by meadows, lakes, goldfish ponds and formal gardens,



they even provided small plastic bags as we entered the house, to prevent rain from our umbrellas dripping on the carpets! It is very much a country gentleman's house, three or four storeys high to accommodate the rolling landscape to which it clings, but not over large, with many small passage ways and staircases leading hither and thither to the neat and elegant principal rooms. These are all furnished with mementos of the family kindly donated by Clementine, Churchill's wife, when history turned the family home into a shrine. Even on a dull day, the house is light and airy, thanks to the architect Phillip Tilden whose work of renovation and extension from 1922 to 1924, cost three times as much as the original purchase price but was money well spent. Even on a dull day, the overall impression is one of light, especially in the dining room, part of the 1922 extension, and in Churchill's study at the top of the old house, where exposure of the ancient beams and rafters created a large, double height

room worthy of its distinguished occupant. And everywhere, spectacular views across rolling English countryside.

Clemmie, unlike Churchill, was constantly worried about the expense of keeping up the house and gardens and soon after the end of the second world war, wealthy well-wishers combined to buy the house and pass it to The National Trust on condition that the two should be able to live out their days there. Ironically, soon afterwards, Churchill's writings on the war made him a rich man.

Some brave souls ventured into the gardens to see the studio, where a further selection of Churchill's paintings remain on display. Others repaired to the restaurant where a lucky few were in time for the delicious lunchtime selection of hot meals. A content and grateful party made its way back home. Never, as Jeremy Cope said of Joan Liggett, our organiser and leader, in the field of social outings, had so many owed so much to one woman.

To Celebrate Sea Britain 2005

Trip to the Historic Dockyard, Chatham

Reported by Merrill Lilley

THE DOVER SOCIETY TRIP to Chatham Dockyard on Saturday, 9th July, was a great success. The coach left Dover at 9.15a.m. and arrived at Chatham at 10.30a.m., where we had an hour and a half to ourselves before starting our guided tour.

The Society had a trip to Chatham in 1996 and there were several changes since that visit. There is always plenty to see at Chatham Dockyard and, while our tour could not include everything,

we packed a great deal into our time there.

We started with a visit to the exhibition of 17 lifeboats, a new addition to the site, and then looked at the ship quays, where there are three vessels open to the public. Here can be seen the Cavalier, the last surviving destroyer of the Royal Navy, built in 1944 and decommissioned in 1972. It occupies the dock where Nelson's Victory was built. The Cavalier spent a